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ABSTRACT

In the past decade, disappointing national outcomes have been reported regarding the transition of youth with disabilities to community and work environments. The transition outlook is even more dismal for rural youth with disabilities, in light of geographic barriers to special education service delivery, lack of jobs in rural areas, and rural shortages of qualified special education personnel. In addition, rural schools must not overlook the importance of educators' personal efficacy to the success of transition programs. Educators with a strong sense of efficacy can apply the professional skills and competencies needed for goal attainment. Generic skills needed to deliver instruction in transition programs are summarized, followed by the skills needed for special education service delivery in rural areas. Addressing the professional development needs of special educators is an important part of promoting effective rural transition practices. The first step in developing a rural transition program is formation of goals and related benchmarks for their achievement. With regard to personal efficacy, productivity measures for each goal lead to concrete knowledge of performance expectations and the application of professional capacity. Drawing on information about the regional population, professional staff, students, and local resources, rural transition teams may design a range of transition options. Besides meeting varied student needs, a range of options also increases the probability of good matches between service delivery needs and professional qualifications. Contains 19 references. (SV)

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TEACHER EFFICACY AND RURAL COMMUNITY TRANSITION FOR ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In 1994, President Clinton signed the School-to-Work Opportunity Act to provide educational assistance for the development of marketable job skills to approximately 75% of those students who will not pursue the traditional college education after high school (Council for Exceptional Children, 1994). These students include high school dropouts and those with a high school diploma but no marketable job skills. According to Krieg, Brown, and Ballard (1995), in the current information age, marketable job skills include:

- acceptance of responsibility for the end product,
- ability to read, write, and use math to solve multistep problems,
- the application of multidisciplinary knowledge to problem solutions,
- ability to organize tasks,
- evaluate products from the consumer's perspective,
- flexibility to meet consumer demand,
- adaptation to changing needs in the workplace,
- interpersonal skills required of a team member,
- adaptation to diversity,
- a broad technical knowledge base and ability to apply it,
- creative problem-solving skills.

Concomitantly, the most critical goal within special education has and continues to be the provision of an education that supports independence and autonomy among children and youth with disabilities. This phase of a student's educational experience is commonly referred to as transition and is defined as "... a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to postsecondary activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation" (IDEA, 1997). Obviously, this goal implies the responsibility to assist youth with disabilities to make a transition from the school to the community and work environments. Unfortunately, data on students' transition indicates that school professionals need to strengthen the educational program and curriculum if students are to achieve successful transition outcomes.

In the past decade, numerous studies have reported disappointing outcomes or benchmarks regarding successful transition to the community. Haring, Lovett, and Smith (1990) reported significant underemployment and low wages for students with disabilities. Wagner (1993) indicated that 31% to 50% of individuals with learning disabilities respectively, either had been arrested once or were parents within five years of high school graduation. Fairweather and Shaver (1991) reported that only 17% of individuals with learning disabilities were enrolled in postsecondary education, and Malcolm, Polatajko and Simons (1990) found that approximately 56% of students with learning disabilities left school before graduation.

While the information provided above describes policy or statistical analysis on a national level, it is logical to assume that the aggregate data masks variation in transition policy or student outcomes on

a regional, state and local level. It is also likely that the outcome measures used to determine transition success in rural areas *are more likely* to reveal more serious problems and potentially, a more dismal transition outlook for rural adolescents with disabilities. Rojewski (1990) reported that rural schools serve larger percentages of students with disabilities or who are at-risk of educational failure. Further, Helge (1992) cites geographic and distance barriers as a hindrance to any special education service delivery. She notes that the cost of service delivery in rural and remote schools sharply escalates due to higher transportation costs and longer time commitments for staff and students to cover distances related to service delivery. Carlson (1993) reports significant poverty in rural areas due to long-term economic decline and an exodus of jobs. These factors result in outdated and low quality programs, limited relevancy to local economic needs, and lack of authentic job experience (Rojewski, 1990).

Compounding these rural barriers are professional recruitment and retention issues faced by rural schools (Gold, Russell, and Williams, 1993). In general, administrators of rural schools report difficulty in recruiting and retaining licensed special education personnel and many of these individuals employed are unprepared to implement a transitional curriculum. Gold, Russell and Williams noted that school administrators reported the need to employ individuals with temporary teaching licenses whose training in special education was limited to nonexistent.

Even when rural schools are able to employ special educators who have completed appropriate courses of study, Collet-Klingenberg (1998) noted that many questions must be researched before the nature of effective transition programs is clearly understood. For example, questions such as what do the best transition practices look like, how shall transitional outcomes be measured, and what are effective transition curricula require attention. Logic further indicates that there is no single correct response to these questions. In fact, it is likely that any attempt to research such questions on a national level will fail since such research may not accommodate the unique characteristics of rural and remote regions of the country. Still another critical variable which must be explored and addressed if rural schools are to build successful transition programs is the professional efficacy required to implement transitional practices.

Personal efficacy as defined by Bandura (1997) is an individual belief in one's ability to perform behaviors required. Bandura has noted that the factors outlined in Figure One contribute to or hinder professional performance.

Figure 1
Factors Which Promote or Impede Professional Performance

Promotional Factors	Related Impedimentary Factors
• explicitly stated performance functions	• avoidance of use of professional capacity
• motivational effects of goals	• poorly directed effort
• inclusion of stakeholders in goalsetting	• low productivity and outcomes
• reciprocity	• failure to accept organizational goals and no personal obligation to meet those goals

Czubaj (1996) asserted that a strong sense of personal efficacy was a requisite for the application of professional competencies needed for goal attainment by teachers. She noted that teachers with a strong belief in personal skills associated with a competency were more likely to apply their knowledge while other competencies were ignored or used less frequently when teachers perceived themselves as unskilled relative to performance. Earlier, Starko and Schack (1989) concluded that the teacher's perception of personal efficacy impacted decisions to initiate activity, the amount of effort applied to the activity and continuance of the activity in the face of obstacles. Following is a summary of the skills required by special educators in the implementation of transition services as well as those skills need for rural special education service delivery.

According to the Council for Exceptional Children (1996), the generic skills required by special educators for the delivery of instructional content and practice which impact transition include the ability to:

- design, implement, and evaluate instructional programs that enhance the student's social participation in family, school, and community activities;
- teach students . . . in a variety of placement settings;
- structure the physical environment to provide optimal learning . . .
- utilize research-supported instructional strategies and practices, including the functional embedded skills approach, community-based instruction, task analysis, multisensory, and concrete/manipulative techniques;
- teach culturally responsive functional life skills relevant to independence in the community, personal living, and employment, including accessing public transportation, cooking, shopping, laundry, functional reading, and sexuality;
- assist students, with the support of parents and other professionals, in planning for transition to adulthood including employment and community and daily life, with maximum opportunities for full participation in the community and decision-making (pp. 48-50).

Similarly, the transition skills cited by Gold, Williams, Stowers, and Dutey (1996) for graduate level training programs designed for special educators serving rural schools include:

- development of vocational training sequences based on an analysis of rural community employment needs;
- application of behavioral analysis procedures to academic and vocational training sequences for students;
- application of appropriate consultation and communication principles with parents, peers and community members, including agencies;
- ability to select and adapt academic materials based on students age, interests, and training needs
- ability to draw from regular and special education curricula for individualized program planning;
- ability to provide appropriate social skill training to students with disabilities;
- selection of effective service delivery models for students with disabilities;
- awareness of alternate resources to provide services to rural students with disabilities.

In rural schools, it is often the case that rural special educators *are the transition program* for students. Since personal efficacy is essential to the development of effective transition practices for rural student with disabilities, it is shortsighted to consider only those factors impacting students. It is also important to consider the professional development needs of special educators serving those students. The first step in the development of a rural transition program is the development of goals and related benchmarks for their achievement. This step is critical since stakeholders should not be overlooked. As Enderlin-Lampe (1997) noted, educational professionals must function as a team to "develop group capacity and ability" in the delivery of educational services. According to Coombe (1993) the

stakeholders include students, teachers (vocational, special, and regular), administrators, parents, potential employers, and agency personnel. The benchmarks lead to data collection related to the goal in question. In other words, the establishment of a goal is insufficient with regard to personal efficacy; rather, productivity measures related to the goal lead to concrete knowledge of performance expectations and the application of professional capacity.

The literature also suggests that goals which are approached in a reciprocal fashion are more frequently achieved. As Bandura (1997) noted, forced consensus is misleading and may mask power plays and pressure to conform. West, Idol and Cannon (1989) define reciprocity as "...allowing all parties to have equal access to information and opportunity to participate in problem identification, discussion, decision-making, and all final outcomes" (p.4). Further, these authors note that reciprocity is achieved when team members engage in job and information sharing, group consensus, complementary efforts and supportive decision-making. Further, Saavedra, Earley, and Van Dyne (1993) state that activities requiring coordination, communication and cooperation between team members impact group efficacy. Similarly, Bandura stated that a "weak link in an activity that has to be performed interdependently can spell group failure even though the remaining members are highly efficacious" (p. 480). Simply put, everyone involved has to be on the same page at the same time.

When setting programmatic goals for the development of transition services, Coombe (1993) urges that stakeholders be provided with detailed information about the service region, the professional staff, the students and local resources. He suggests that those coordinating the work of the group provide the following data:

- *The Region*--regional population including population of working age, total population working, nature of employment and future trends;
- *The Professional Staff*--professional training and both school and nonstop employment history;
- *The Students*--student paid and unpaid employment history, how employment was secured, the nature of the job, salary, employment length and reasons for leaving, the nature of support systems available, vocational and educational assessment results;
- *The Local Resources*--Vocational Rehabilitation Office, the Private Industry Council, area employment offices, representatives from state colleges and universities, and representatives from the business community.

Using the information provided above, many rural school transition teams begin to design not one but multiple transition options to meet the array of needs exhibited by students with mild to severe disabilities. Coollet-Klingenberg (1998) suggests that rural schools with successful transition outcomes provide a wide range of transition experiences for high school students. Benz, Yovanoff and Doren (1997) have found that school-to-work programs are one of the positive predictors for successful school transition. These authors suggest that the following work experiences are statistically relevant to successful transition outcomes; community service, job shadowing, school-based enterprise, youth apprenticeships and paid work experience.

In addition to successful transition outcomes, efficacy is another important reason to plan for a variety of work-school based learning activities. Since there are varying degrees of knowledge and experience among the stakeholders involved in providing transition services, building individual and group efficacy must include a match between each stakeholder's ability, knowledge and experience and their role in the delivery of a transition curriculum. Figure Two illustrates the potential match and mismatch between a professional involved in service provision and the knowledge and experience required for implementation.

Figure 2

The Match and Mismatch Between Transition Professionals and Transition Services

Professional	Transition Activity	Knowledge Required	Skills Required	Efficacy low to high
special educator	instruction in basic skills for employment	- material selection - instructional planning - task analysis - instruction	- determining readability - previewing materials - modifying materials - prompting, guided practice, evaluation, data collection, record keeping	- high - high - moderate - high
special educator	place student in paid work environment	- understanding vocational assessment results - communicate with student, parent, staff, employer - job analysis - job training - evaluation	- interpret vocational assessment results - collaborative and assertive communication; written communication skill - social analysis, environmental analysis, academic analysis - task analysis, prompting, error correction, feedback, reinforcement - data collection-qualitative and quantitative	- moderate - low - low - high - moderate

To improve efficacy among professionals involved in delivering a variety of transition services, it may be necessary to supplement each individual's training and experience. For example, if one skill or competency in the set required for provision of a transition service is ranked by the individual responsible as "moderate," it is possible to target that skill for professional development. Similarly, if most of the skills required for service delivery are perceived as low relative to personal efficacy, the best decision may be to identify another member of the professional team to deliver that particular service. In

short, to improve the quality and breadth of transition services, professionals involved in delivery should have an opportunity to communicate their perceptions of the extent to which each is prepared to meet transitional goals. *The match between the professionals perceived ability to execute skills required for the specified transition service is key to overall program success.*

When all stakeholders involved have an opportunity to engage in the following tasks in the establishment of transition programs, reciprocity is achieved and both individual and group efficacy increase.

- examination of student, community and professional data
- participation in goal setting
- recommendations regarding staffing patterns and organizational expectations
- examination of outcome data
- evaluation of program effectiveness

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